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ABSTRACT

The debate over whether "schools make a difference" touched off by Christopher Jencks' "Inequality" continues to flourish. In this issue, a summary of the Jencks' book and the views of some of its critics are presented. Bird's-eye critiques are given by Alice Rivlin, ten black social scientists, including, among others, Ronald Edmonds, Stephen Michelson, Lester Thurow, Kenneth Clark, James Coleman, and Beverly Duncan. Reference is also made to several articles on Jencks' "Inequality" by several well-known spokesmen for social and educational issues. (SB)

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The debate over whether "schools make a difference" touched off by Christopher Jencks' Inequality continues to flourish. In this issue we summarize the Jencks' book and the views of some of its critics.

Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America by Christopher Jencks, Marshall Smith, Henry Acland, Mary Jo Bane, David Cohen, Herbert Gintis, Barbara Heyns, and Stephan Michelson. Inequality is a detailed challenge to the egalitarian assumption that schools are an important instrument in equalizing status and income, an assumption the author believes underlies various policy initiatives of the 1960s including the "war on poverty". Presenting evidence from disparate sources,* Jencks concludes that the egalitarian assumption is wrong. He argues that society should redistribute income now rather than waiting for a day when education will equalize earning power.

Schools are Unequal

Jencks does not suggest that educational opportunities are now equal. He says that educational resources are unequally distributed and that "some people have more chance than others to attend school with the kind of schoolmates they prefer". Similarly, some people are denied access to "preferred curriculums". He argues for equalizing per pupil expenditures, for free choice in curriculum assignment and "equalizing access to privileged classmates" (another "freedom of choice" solution that he concedes would not necessarily result in race or class integration.) But he does not seek these reforms on grounds that they will make students more equal after completing school. Rather they are to be sought for their own sake (equalizing resources may bring a new play ground which will enhance a student's"chances of having a good time during recess"; and because they may bring about similar reform in institutions that serve adults.

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* Jencks draws from an enlarged data base which includes, in addition to many other statistical sources, a well known comprehensive survey by James S. Coleman et al., Equality of Educational Opportunity (EEOS or the Coleman Report). The Coleman Report made a survey of about 600,000 school children and 60,000 teachers in 40,000 schools to find the lack of available equal educational opportunities by reason of race, religion, or national origin. Jencks and associates also submit evidence based on several small statistical studies of their own.

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Relative Importance of Factors of Cognitive Inequality

Jencks then presents evidence which disputes the following "egalitarian" assumptions: (1) social and economic differences between rich and poor can be attributed "in good part" to differences in cognitive skill; (2) cognitive skills can be measured by standardized tests; (3) "differences in performance in cognitive skills can be partly explained by differences in the amount and quality of schooling (children) get", and (4) equalizing educational opportunity is an important step toward equalizing "blacks and whites, rich and poor, and people in general".

Part of Jencks' evidence against egalitarian assumptions is a detailed analysis of what test scores measure and why some people do better on tests than others. Jencks focuses on the Equality of Educational Opportunity Survey (EEOS) for the analysis of what tests measure. Regarding the question of why some people do better on tests than others, Jencks assesses the relative importance of genes, family background, social class, and race as determining factors. Using data principally from EEOS and Project Talent, the author then discusses "schools' effects on cognitive inequality". Jencks'overall conclusions from the available data suggest that:

* If we could equalize everyone's genes, inequality in test scores would probably fall by 33 to 50 percent.

* If we could equalize everyone's total environment, test score inequality would fall by 25 to 40 percent.

* If we merely equalize everyone's economic status, test score inequality would fall by 6 percent or less.

* Equalizing the amount of schooling people get might reduce cognitive inequality among adults by 5 to 15 percent, although this estimate is very rough.

* Equalizing the quality of elementary schools would reduce cognitive inequality by 3 percent or less.

* Equalizing the quality of high schools would reduce inequality by 1 percent or less.

* Eliminating racial and socio-economic segregation in the schools might reduce the test score gap between black and white children and between rich and poor children by 10 or 20 percent.

* Additional school expenditures are unlikely to increase achievement, and re-distributing resources will not reduce test score inequality.

Based on these conclusions, Jencks rejects the idea that there should be an attempt to eliminate all variation in cognitive skill. He says, however, that the present degree of cognitive inequality should not be accepted as inevitable. That is to say, people's cognitive skill should not be left far below national norms. If people are inadequate in these skills, they are apt to be exploited in a variety of ways.

Noncognitive Traits and Economic Success

Jencks recognizes that "cognitive skills are not the only outcome of schooling". Schools also teach to some extent noncognitive traits such as patriotism, punctuality,

curiosity, and creativity. Based on a survey of American Catholics, he doubts "that differences between schools have much effect on the noncognitive determinants of economic success". But the author believes that noncognitive traits may play a larger role in determining economic success than cognitive skills. However, Jencks is not sure what these noncognitive effects are.

Relative Importance of Factors of Educational Attainment

Having argued that the effect of schools on the degree of cognitive and noncognitive inequality among adults is modest, Jencks turns to the question of who gets educational credentials, and why. Most assume that the differences between highly educated and uneducated people are caused by schools. Jencks argues, however, that people who stay in school and attend college would differ from people who drop out even if everyone had the exact same amount of schooling. Schools, according to the author, serve primarily as selection and certification agencies, and secondarily as socialization agencies which change people. Hence, schools do not create inequality, they legitimize it.

Jencks answers the question in two parts. He first considers the effects of economic background, race, family background, and academic credentials. He concludes that "the most important determinant of educational attainment is family background". Besides family background, cognitive skill is the most important determinant of educational attainment. It is difficult to tell, however, how closely cognitive skills relate to educational attainment. This is because cognitive skills can only be measured by tests, and test scores may reflect other factors as well, such as noncognitive differences between home environments.

Secondly, Jencks considers "the effects of schools on their students' eventual attainment". The author looks at high schools, elementary and secondary schools. Much of the evidence for this analysis was taken from Project Talent and EEOS data. Jencks finds that "qualitative differences between high schools seem to explain about 2% of the variation in students' educational attainment", and that school resources appear to have no influence on students' educational attainment. As for attending school with very good students, there appears to be "both positive and negative effects on a student's chances of attending college". The only measurable factor which influences attainment is a student's assigned curriculum. Jencks says in terms of curriculum placement, "there is far more variation in educational attainment between different students in the same school than between the average students in one school and the average students in another school". Hence, it is the wide variation in curriculum placement within schools rather than between schools that account for differences in educational attainment.

Relative Importance of Factors of Occupational Status

Jencks then examines why some people end up in high-status occupations while others do not. Much of the evidence supports traditional liberal assumptions that there is considerable occupational mobility from one generation to the next. The author finds that the correlation between a father's occupational status and his son's status is less than 0.60 (or "42 percent of the men whose fathers are in the top fifth of the occupational hierarchy end up there themselves".) In addition, Jencks finds that the relationship of overall family background to a son's occupation is stronger than father's occupation. But he says family background is not the primary determinant of status. Jencks explains that if random individuals are compared, their statuses differ by an average of 28 points.**

** In measuring occupational status, Jencks uses the "Duncan scale" where the highest score is 96 points and the lowest is zero.

The average status difference in a comparison of fathers and sons is about 20 points. In a comparison of brothers, the average status difference is 23 points. Thus, "there is nearly as much variation in status between brothers as in the larger population".

Jencks also evaluates "the role of educational attainment, test scores, genes, school quality, and race in determining men's eventual occupations". He concludes that "occupational status is strongly related to educational attainment". School is important but only "in and of itself, not as a proxy for cognitive skills or family background". Family background and cognitive skills help a person through school, but have "very little direct influence on status". While occupational status is more closely related to educational attainment than any other factor measured, enormous status differences exist among people with the same amount of education. This conclusion is true when people who have the same amount of schooling, family background, and test scores are compared. Therefore, Jencks says, "at least half the variation in men's occupational statuses can be explained by factors other than family background, test scores, or educational attainment". It might be that some of the unexplained variation is due to unmeasured character traits, chance and choice of occupation.

Relative Importance of Factors of Income Inequality

In addition to status differences, Jencks discusses the extent of income inequality over the past 40 years. He looks at the relationship between an individual's income and his socio-economic, racial and family background. The author also examines the relationship between cognitive skill, (as measured by test scores), education, and income, and at income differences between men in different occupations. Jencks finds that family background, cognitive skill, educational attainment, and occupational status do not explain much of the variation in men's incomes. He says that if you compare men who are identical in terms of family background, cognitive skill, etc., only 12 to 15 percent less inequality will be found than among random individuals. Hence, there is just about as much inequality among men who are similar as among men in general. The question becomes: how is this income inequality among men similarly situated to be explained?

It may be that "some men value money more than others" and sacrifice to get it. Or, income may depend on "varieties of competence" having little relation to family background, educational attainment, or cognitive skill, such as hitting a ball thrown at a high speed, having the ability to persuade a customer to buy a larger car than he thought he wanted, etc. Income may also depend on luck such as chance acquaintances, the range of jobs available when job hunting, and other unpredictable occurrences. Jencks says that if income depends on factors which have little to do with family background, schooling, test scores and occupation, it seems that strategies which are designed to reduce economic inequality by equalizing opportunity will not work very well. He points out that equal opportunity strategies seldom involve direct efforts at equalizing men's competence in their work, and they do not deal with inequalities which result from incidents "over which an individual has no control".

Relative Importance of Factors of Job Satisfaction

Finally, Jencks looks at the factors which influence people's satisfaction with their jobs. He finds that people who hold high-status jobs are only slightly more satisfied than people who hold low-status jobs. Moreover, job satisfaction is only marginally related to educational attainment and earnings.

Policy Implication

The author concludes Inequality by stating that the evidence reviewed suggests that school reform (equalizing educational opportunity) cannot be expected to bring about significant social changes outside the school (making adults more equal). Three reasons seem to indicate this result:

1) Children seem to be more influenced by what happens at home than by what happens in schools.
2) Reformers have very little control over those aspects of school life that affect children. (The reallocation of resources, reassignment of pupils, and changes in curriculum seldom change the way teachers and students treat each other).
3) Even when a school exerts an unusual influence on children, the resulting changes are not likely to persist into adulthood.

Consequently, Jencks says if equalizing the distribution of income is a desirable objective, what is needed is a more direct approach than the "manipulation of marginal institutions like schools". This means that political control over the economic institutions that shape our society will have to be established. Jencks says that this is commonly called socialism, but this is what is needed if we are not to be disappointed as we were with the reforms of the 1960s. Inequality is available from Basic Books at $12.50.

Comments and Criticism on Inequality

Publication of Inequality has been greeted with mixed reactions over the validity of the analytic model used and the conclusions drawn from the evidence presented. In the February, 1973 issue of the Harvard Educational Review, several persons involved in educational research present their views on Inequality. The first response comes from Philip W. Jackson who criticizes neither Jencks' analytic model nor conclusions per se, but disagrees with the viewpoint of the book. Jackson says that Jencks realizes that his "factory metaphor" view of schools (preoccupation with the measurable effects of various school inputs upon students' performance on tests and in later life) is fallacious and that his "pleasure dome" principle (school spending can be justified as making life more pleasant for students now) is limited. But Jackson says, Jencks appears to lack any other perspective to view schools. What Jencks does not consider, Jackson says, is the school's role in helping students to get the most out of their experiences and integrate them into a process of development. He suggests that Jencks' publisher offer a free copy of John Dewey's Experience and Education to each purchaser of Inequality.

Alice M. Rivlin in response to Inequality sees the book as a part of a new tradition of "forensic social science". She says that in forensic social science "scholars or teams of scholars take on the task of writing briefs for or against particular policy positions".*** Scholars with a counter position are then left to pick apart the case already presented with counter evidence. Rivlin characterizes the book as an elaborate attack on a straw man. She notes that Jencks concedes that schools have been successful in raising the general level of cognitive skills; and that his contention that they have failed to reduce cognitive inequality is hardly surprising since his own evidence shows that little effort has been made in this direction. Obviously, income redistribution is a more direct way of reducing

*** A rather pure example of this new tradition is James W. Guthrie, et. al., Schools and Inequality, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971.

income inequality than school reform. The problem is that income redistribution is politically difficult to achieve. Rivlin points out that Jencks, while advocating school reform, has written a book that "may well do harm" to policies the author says he supports. Perhaps the book's greatest weakness as an example of forensic social science is its obscurity (the evidence is not displayed openly for all to see and question). Forensic social science, she says, should have a high standard of clarity and fully present evidence if important public issues are to be sharpened rather than made obscure.

Another response comes from ten black social scientists****who had previously met at the Carnegie Corporation of New York to discuss Inequality, the Coleman Report, and the work of Daniel P. Moynihan. Several critical reviews of Inequality and similar works were prepared on the basis of the conversations held at the Carnegie meeting. Ronald Edmonds edited the reviews to produce a single response to Inequality.

Edmonds says that Jencks by letting school officials off the book has done "a disservice to black and low income children". Most commentators have always agreed that overall social change is needed in addition to educational opportunity"to right the ways of this country". Inequality will be seen to suggest that education should not be our worry, because only social and economic change will bring about educational gain. Edmonds says that "even if fundamental social change could come tommorrow, schools would still play a vital role in preparing children for society, even if the society is just". "Inequality errs most notably", in the under-estimation of this task.

Edmonds points out two basic flaws in Jencks' conclusions. The first concerns Jencks' view of the problem as children "needing help" because they don't score well on standardized tests. Edmonds suggest that the failures are those of the schools rather than of the students and that what is needed is "help" for the schools.

The second flaw in Jencks' conclusion "is his failure to understand (that) the relationship between schooling and the racial order's perception of 'equality' is ethnocentric. Society's ethnocentric perception of equality means that high income will not bring an individual's equality unless that individual has habits of speech, appearance, and behavior that conform to society's ethnocentric notions. Edmonds says that Jencks' view that schooling is only a marginal instrument of social improvement "is valid only if one accepts income as the end toward which we strive".*****

Edmonds concludes by questioning Jencks' inference that schools are doing the best they can to improve pupil performance. Edmonds considers a Michigan school program which improved pupil performance by moving the burden of performance from the pupil to the school. On the basis of the Michigan program, he says that it is significant "that pupil performance can be improved when educational decision makers have the will and the commitment to make social service institutions accountable for their behavior".

**** Those social scientists and educators meeting at the Carnegie Corporation were Ronald Edmonds, Andrew Billingsley, James Comer, James M. Dyer, William Hall, Robert Hill, Nan McGehee, Lawrence Reddick, Howard F. Taylor, and Stephen Wright.

***** Edmonds also points out that Jencks' work despite its appearance of scientific sophistication is not without methodological pitfalls. For instance, the use of the statistical technique "path analysis" ignores possible nonlinear relationships; it ignores interactive or conditional relationships; it ignores two-way causal relationships, and it ignores variables (or factors) which may not constitute an interval scale.

Stephan Michelson (listed as one of the book's authors) says that Inequality is about numbers, and does not contribute to meaningful public debate He says that the book, as an academic product, debates specific questions which "ar not of much importance". Michelson states that "Jencks' findings represent lifetime income chances for some people, but misrepresent those chances for others". He also says that "there is no relationship between the questions posed (by Jencks) and the solutions offered". However, Michelson says he is in agreement with Jencks that the solution to inequality is a socialist society.

Lester C. Thurow in response to Inequality says that in order to understand Jencks' book, it is necessary to read the appendices and footnotes. He says that "(To) some extent the statements in the main text of the book are at variance with the qualifications in the footnotes and appendices". An example of this is Jencks' statement in the main text that forty-five percent of I.Q. is inherited. Thurow says the appendix leads to the conclusion that within a wide range - ten percent to ninety percent - it is not known how much I.Q. is or is not inherited. Thurow, however, in his response concentrates on the economic problems of what determines one's income. While Thurow agrees with Jencks' basic argument that education has been oversold, he argues that there are limitations in the proof of this proposition. The limitations result from statistical analysis in the social sciences.

Kenneth B. Clark's response to Inequality does not deal with methodological problems, findings, or conclusions of the book. Clark is concerned with the presentation of a book dealing with the important issue of racial equality in "an essentially glib, journalistic, smart-alecky manner". The consequences of social scientists dealing with matters of equity and justice through Madison Avenue advertising techniques is a problem for serious social scientists and their professional organizations to face. He concludes we must continue to rely upon the political, the legislative, and the judicial apparatuses for dealing with matters of equity and justice. Democratic processes cannot be permitted to be eroded by a social science posture of omniscience.

James S. Coleman's response to Inequality concerns Jencks' confusion between different meanings of inequality which lead to fundamental difficulties in the book Coleman says that one meaning of inequality in society is the "differential distribution of income and other social rewards to different persons" which is the "inequality of result". The second meaning (or sense) of inequality is "the relation of a person's background to the social rewards he comes to gain" which is the "inequality of opportunity". Coleman says that a curious aspect of Jencks' book is that in Chapters 7 and 9 it is concerned with inequality of income, and the policy proposals are directed to that inequality. However, the analysis in the book is directed to questions of inequality of opportunity. Hence, Inequality, according to Coleman, "fails to study appropriately either inequalities of income or inequalities of opportunity". Coleman says that Jencks could have written a different book which would have stayed with inequality of incomes, and focused on the inequalities of rewards among occupational positions. In approaching the subject in this way Coleman argues that Jencks would have been able to deal with a variety of factors not dealt with in the present book, such as "the demand for activities for which skills are scarce, and the control of entrance into highly paid positions, e.g., by professional associations or union or credentialling systems".

Beverly Duncan agrees with Jencks that an attempt should be made to "lessen the range of income which an American adult may receive". Her comments are grouped under five headings: the role of luck; opportunity, inequality, and deprivation; groups versus individuals; earning power and non-earners; and schooling and the national interest.

Christopher Jencks then considers the responses. Jencks says that Inequality is a short book with limited objectives. The book "sought to show that equalizing opportunity, especially educational opportunity, would not do much to reduce economic inequality or alleviate poverty". Even with the "immodest title", many expected more than the negative findings. Both Coleman and Michelson thought that there should be an explication of the actual causes of income inequality. Philip W. Jackson comments that the book's definition of "the purpose of schooling are cursory and inadequate".

Jencks does not apologize for not having written a different book, he explains rather why the book was written. Jencks says that after spending the years 1961 to 1967 in Washington, he left feeling that federal policymakers and legislators had accepted "a series of plausible but erroneous assumptions about the nature of poverty and economic inequality in America". Thus, Inequality was "an attempt to change the terms of public debate about how to deal with poverty and inequality".

Jencks says that he does not feel that Inequality will have much immediate impact on public policy. He says that if the ideas of Inequality become generally accepted, they might exert some impact on policy in the long run. The acceptance of the book's conclusions will depend on the accuracy of the quantitative estimate and the validity of the inferences drawn from those numbers, says Jencks.

Jencks in answering the responses first considers the criticisms of the data and the analytic model in Inequality. He finds the criticism unconvincing. Jencks says that he is most disturbed that the objections are not well founded. The issues raised, he says, are considered in the text, the notes, or the appendices of the book. While the conclusions may not be correct, Jencks suggests that critics take account of the evidence cited.

Jencks concedes that it does seem that some of the conclusions drawn from the evidence are vulnerable. He deals with four such issues: the relationship between individual and group inequality, the role of luck, the ethics of redistribution, and the effects of the characteristics of the labor force in the distribution of income.

Other Comments

There have been several other articles dealing with the methodology, findings, and conclusions of Inequality. Three such articles appeared in the Washington Post, October 15, 1972: Bayard Rustin, "Equal Opportunity and the Liberal Will", Charles A. Asbury, "Yesterday's Fai ure" and Richard Graham, "Tomorrow's Promise". All of the authors are critical of Jencks' position. Bennett Harrison in a Washington Post article on November 19, 1972, "Training for Nowhere" concurs with Jencks that too much is expected from schools. Harrison's sympathy with Jencks' observation is based upon a study of his own which concluded that public investments in the education and training of urban blacks did not reduce inequality in employment opportunity. The study draws from a data base which involved the interviewing of more than 50,000 individuals from 1965-1966 by the Labor Department and Census Bureau.

For other articles on the Jencks' book, see Henry Levin, "The Social Science Objectivity Gap" in Saturday Review, November 11, 1972 and Nathan Kefitz, "Can Inequality Be Cured?" in the Spring issue (1973) of The Public Interest. See also the review articles of George Levine, Inequality in the November 26, 1972 New York Times Book Review, and Steven Kelman, Inequality in the December 31, 1972 Washington Post book World. In addition to these reviews, Clark Whelton, writes of an interesting interview he held with Jencks in the Village Voice of October 12, 1972 ("How Much Did Harvard Help?").

Related Work

Articles which do not deal with the Jencks' book per se, but relate to the same subject matter are by Lester C. Thurow, "Education and Economic Equality", Summer issue (1972) of The Public Interest, Daniel Bell, "Meritocracy and Equality" and Seymour Martin Lipset, "Social Mobility and Equal Opportunity", both in the Fall issue (1972) of The Public Interest.

For a general account of the debate see Godfrey Hodgson "Do Schools Make A Difference" in the March issue (1973) of Atlantic Monthly. Hodgson summarizes the positions of Jencks, Moynihan, Coleman, Pettigrew, Jensen, Herrnstein, and Armor.

Shortly after the publication of Inequality, the Census Bureau issued new evidence on educational transformation in the United States. The report shows that the typical American has nearly four more years of education than he did in 1940. Moreover a more dramatic change took place among young blacks (in 1940 educational attainment for all blacks was 5.7 years of schooling, now it is 10.3 years). The report also found a strong relationship between the amount of schooling and income (the more years of school completed, the higher a person's annual earnings). Educational Attainment (P20-243) is available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, at 65¢.

In a telephone interview with the New York Times, Jencks commented on the study saying: "The tables are right. The association between schooling and income is there. What remains a mystery is why". Jencks said that the relationship is between income and years in school, and not between income and achievement in school. He stated further that it has not been demonstrated by anyone that there is a strong relationship between high income and measures of educational performance such as standardized tests. The Jencks study found that college graduates who scored poorly on standardized tests earn slightly less than students who had average scores. On the other hand, Jencks found that college graduates earn much more than high school students with high test scores. Jencks gives two explanations of these findings. He says that (1) employers pay for credentials, and (2) those who make it through college may have been good at figuring out what the teacher wanted, so when he goes to a job, he is "even better at figuring out what the boss expects". (See Jack Rosenthal, "Census Shows Sharp Rise in Schooling, New York Times, December 8, 1972).

RESEARCH NOTES

Local Public Schools: How to Pay for Them? Compiled by Dorothy Campbell Tompkins. This extensive bibliography concerned with public school financing came about as a result of Serrano v. Priest. Materials from public administration, law, education, and state and local government since 1965 are listed. The bibliography contains a section on the "Inequality of Educational Opportunity" and the "Financing of Local Public Schools". It also covers state financing and federal assistance to local public schools. Various programs and proposals for financing local public schools such as "performance contracting", the "voucher system", and the "value-added tax" are taken up. The bibliography is available from the Institute of Governmental Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, at $3.50.

The Effectiveness of Manpower Training Programs: A Review of Research on the Impact on the Poor By Jon H. Goldstein. The author reviews the evidence on the impact of manpower training programs on the earnings of the poor in order to assess whether it is likely that expanded training programs can reduce public assistance payments and the size of the welfare population. Five programs are examined: Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA), Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC), Job Corps, Job Opportunities in the Business Section (JOBS), and the Work Incentive Program (WIN). The major conclusion of the study is that income supplement programs are likely to be necessary even though there are increased earnings for the poor after manpower training. The report is available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, at 45¢.